

Components of an Assessment Task

A PASS assessment task consists of five components: abstract, prompt, directions, procedure, and scoring rubric. Each of these components is described below.

Abstract

This is a brief description of the assessment task. It states generally what learning by a student the task is designed to assess, and it summarizes what students do to perform the task.

Prompt

This is the stimulus material given to students at the time of assessment, which they must use while carrying out the assessment task. The purpose of the prompt is twofold. First, it activates prior knowledge that would be useful to a student performing the assessment task. Second, it provides students with information or a tool to be used while performing the task. A prompt could be presented through various media, e.g., print, auditory, or visual. Prompts might also take various forms, e.g., reading, graphic, motion picture, recording, map, template, data set, etc. When possible, the actual prompt or prompts should be included. If that is not feasible, a thorough description of the prompt(s) should be furnished.

Directions to Students

These are instructions actually provided to students to guide them in carrying out the task. The directions should tell students what they are expected to produce, which procedures to follow in carrying out the task, and what parameters have been set for them, e.g. time limits, place to work, materials provided or available, and opportunities to consult with others while working. These directions should be included exactly as they would be given to students at the time they are directed to perform the assessment task. They should include a very clear statement of the product students are expected to generate as a result of performing the assessment

task as well as the criteria that will be used to gauge the quality of student work, i.e., the scoring rubric. It is the students being assessed who are the audience for these directions.

Procedures

These are steps the teacher will follow in administering the assessment. What will be done by the teacher to enable students to perform the task? How will the teacher prepare for the assessment to occur? What arrangements will be made? What materials will be assembled? How will data be gathered to evaluate students' performance? The steps to be followed by the teacher in conducting the assessment should be listed, and each step should be briefly elaborated. These procedures should be written so that another teacher, new to the assessment task, can carry them out.

Scoring Rubric

Each benchmark being assessed by the task should be identified in the scoring rubric so that assessment is carefully aligned with curriculum. There should be a four-point scale for scoring each benchmark. A score of 2 indicates the minimal criteria necessary to meet a benchmark. Scores of 3 and 4 indicate that progressively more demanding criteria that are necessary to exceed a benchmark have been met. A score of 1 indicates that progress has been made toward meeting a benchmark, but that it has not yet been met. Criteria for assigning each of the four scores for every benchmark being assessed should be clearly stated in the rubric. These criteria should specify "how good is good enough" for a particular score to be assigned. The scoring rubric can be laid out as a grid with the score points of the scale across the horizontal axis and the benchmarks down the vertical axis. Each cell of the grid contains the criteria for assigning a particular score to a single benchmark. Students should receive a separate score for each benchmark. The separate scores could be combined or weighted to compute a general score (grade) for the entire task.

Scoring Rubrics for Assessment Task Standards

General Rules for Scoring

The seven standards for assessment tasks are considered equally important. Each standard is scored on a three-point or four-point numeric scale. The descriptions which follow for scores on each standard constitute the minimal criteria for that score. Scoring should follow these general rules:

- If in doubt between two scores, make the decision by asking whether the minimal conditions of the higher score have been met. If not, use the lower score.
- In determining scores for each standard, consider only the evidence in the written description of the assessment task.
- Scores should take into account what students can reasonably be expected to do at the grade level.
- The seven standards for assessment tasks are considered equally important. Some of them are scored on a three-point numeric scale and others on a four-point scale with 1 being low and 3 or 4 being high.
- Scores across standards should not be summed or averaged. Rather, each standard should be considered individually.

Scoring Rubrics

Standard 1. Organization of Information

The task asks students to organize, synthesize, interpret, explain or evaluate complex information in addressing a concept, problem, or issue.

Consider the extent to which the task asks the student to organize, interpret, evaluate, or synthesize complex information, rather than to retrieve or to reproduce isolated fragments of knowledge or to repeatedly apply previously learned algorithms and procedures. To score high, the task should call for interpretation of nuances of a topic that go deeper than surface exposure or familiarity.

- 3 = high
- 2 = moderate
- 1 = low

When students are asked to gather information for reports that indicates some selectivity and organizing beyond

mechanical copying, but are not asked for interpretation, evaluation, or synthesis, assign a score of 2.

Standard 2. Consideration of Alternatives

The task asks students to consider alternative solutions, strategies, perspectives, or points of view in addressing a concept, problem or issue.

To what extent does success in the task require consideration of alternative solutions, strategies, perspectives, or points of view? To score high, the task should clearly involve students in considering alternatives, either through explicit presentation of the alternatives or through an activity that cannot be successfully completed without examination of alternatives implicit in the work. It is not necessary that students' final conclusions include the listing or weighing of alternatives, but this could be an impressive indicator that it was an expectation of the task.

- 3 = high
- 2 = moderate
- 1 = low

Standard 3. Disciplinary Content

The task asks students to show understanding of or use ideas, theories, or perspectives considered central to a social studies discipline.

To what extent does the task promote students' understanding of and thinking about ideas, theories, or perspectives considered seminal or critical within a social studies discipline or recognized interdisciplinary field?

- 3 = Success in the task clearly requires understanding of concepts, ideas, or theories central in a discipline.
- 2 = Success in the task seems to require understanding of concepts, ideas, or theories central in a discipline, but the task does not make these very explicit.
- 1 = Success in the task can be achieved with a very superficial (or even without any) understanding of concepts, ideas, or theories central to any social studies discipline.

Standard 4. Disciplinary Process

The task asks students to use methods of inquiry, research, or communication characteristic of a social studies discipline.

To what extent does the task lead students to use methods of inquiry, research, communication, and discourse characteristic of a social studies discipline? Some powerful processes of inquiry may not be linked uniquely to any particular discipline (e.g., interpreting graphs), but they will be valued here if the task calls for their use in ways similar to important uses within the discipline.

3 = Success in the task requires the use of methods of inquiry or discourse important to the conduct of a discipline, e.g., interpreting primary sources, conducting a survey, making a map, or plotting economic data.

2 = Success in the task requires use of methods of inquiry or discourse not central to the conduct of a discipline.

1 = Success in the task can be achieved without use of any specific methods of inquiry or discourse.

Standard 5. Elaborated Communication

The task asks students to elaborate on their understanding, explanations, or conclusions through extended speaking or writing.

This standard is intended to measure the extent to which a task requires the use of language by students to elaborate on their ideas and conclusions through extended writing or speaking characteristic of a discipline. The task for this standard is scored on a four-point scale.

4 = Analysis/Persuasion

The task calls for extended written or oral explanation of a solution to a problem, a conclusion or generalization drawn from inquiry, or a position on an issue. Examples include attempts to argue, convince, or persuade and to develop or test hypotheses.

3 = Report/Summary

The task calls for an account of a particular event or series of events ("This is what happened."), a generalized narrative, a description of a recurrent pattern of events, or steps in a procedure or path followed to solve a problem ("This is what happens," "This is the way it is done.").

2 = Short-answer Exercise

The task requires little more than presenting a result or stating an answer in only one or two brief sentences to questions of a short-answer exercise.

1 = Multiple Choice/Fill-in-the-blank

Students are expected to answer multiple choice or fill-in-the-blank exercises with less than a sentence.

Standard 6. Problem Connected to the World Beyond the Classroom

The task asks students to address a concept, problem or issue that is similar to one that they have encountered or are likely to encounter in civic life beyond the classroom.

To what extent does the task present students with a question, issue, or problem that they have actually encountered, or are likely to encounter, in their civic lives beyond school?

Certain kinds of school knowledge may be considered valuable as cultural capital or cultural literacy needed in social, civic, or vocational situations beyond the classroom (e.g., knowing how a bill becomes a law or how to compute interest on an investment). However, the demands of a task for culturally valued, "basic" knowledge are not counted here unless the task requires applying knowledge to a specific civic problem likely to be encountered beyond the classroom.

When students are allowed to choose a topic of interest to them, this might also indicate likely applications of knowledge beyond the instructional setting. But tasks that allow student choice do not necessarily connect to issues beyond the classroom. To score high on this standard, it must be clear that the question, issue, or problem which students confront resembles one that students have encountered, or are likely to encounter, in civic life beyond school.

3 = The question, issue, or problem clearly resembles one that students have encountered, or are likely to encounter, in civic life beyond school. The resemblance is so clear that teacher explanation is not necessary for most students to grasp it.

2 = The question, issue, or problem bears some resemblance to real world social experiences of the students, but the connections are not immediately apparent. The connections would be reasonably clear if explained by the teacher, but the task need not include such explanations to be rated 2.

1 = The problem has virtually no resemblance to questions, issues, or problems that students have encountered, or are likely to encounter, beyond school. Even if the teacher tried to show the connections, it would be difficult to make a persuasive argument.

Standard 7. Audience Beyond the Classroom

The task asks students to communicate their knowledge, present a product or performance, or take some action for an audience beyond the teacher, classroom, and school building.

Authenticity increases when students complete the task with the intention of communicating their knowledge to an audience beyond the teacher and when they actually communicate with that audience. Such communication can include informing others, trying to persuade others,

performing, and taking other actions beyond the classroom. This refers not to the process of working on the task, but to the nature of the student's product.

The task for this standard is scored on a four-point scale.

4 = Final product is presented to an audience beyond the school.

3 = Final product is presented to an audience beyond the classroom, but within the school.

2 = Final product is presented to peers within the classroom.

1 = Final product is presented only to the teacher.

